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WEAK HOURS.

"And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and rose up, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright."—GENESIS XXV. 29-34.

These scenes, some parts of which I have read to you, when read with interest are almost as good as a journey into a foreign land. New phases, new geography, new manners, new customs—very old, so old that they are new (and there is nothing so new as that which is very old)—these things present themselves. Strange ideas of morality, crude, germinant and imperfect, are presented. And yet, withal, strangely mixed with faults are eminent virtues—faults of the times, of inexperience, of rude states of society; and virtues, native and conspicuous. And so were various experiences mingled, forming a piebald picture.

There was that noble old chief, Abraham—a fine old gentleman; a gentleman, but timid, and lying without any hesitation to save his own life. There was that son of his, Isaac, who, like his father, lied, under the same circumstances, to save his life; but who, otherwise, was mild, sweet-tempered, preferring to yield ground rather than to fight. And Isaac it was to whom the wife Rebecca was sent, the account of which I read in your hearing, and during the reading of which none of you went to sleep—for who is there that is not interested in young love, or anything that leads to it?

Rebecca became the wife of Isaac; and there was given to her a pair of twins, the first born of which was Esau, so called because he was covered with hair, rough-skinned, and ragged—the very epitome of force. The other was fair; and he was called Jacob.

Now, there seems to have been in the family that which, if it

SUNDAY EVENING, JAN. 26, 1873. LESSON: Gen. xxiv. 1–59. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 847, 78, 1259.

exist, should not be made manifest—a relative partiality. The father took to one of these brothers, and the mother to the other; but they ought both of them to have taken to each. It is not in human nature not to like some children that are better born than others; but it ought not to be shown—certainly it ought not to come—into the management of the household. But what is strange in this story is, that the father liked the one that we should have supposed the mother would have liked, and that the mother liked the one that we should have supposed the father would have liked. For usually women like strength, and a certain sort of high chieftianship—a carrying of one's self with power and freedom and genius. That was Esau all over. On the other hand, a father—a *good* father—ordinarily takes to the boy that is thoughtful, and meditative, and obedient, and docile, and stays at home, and keeps things right. But that was not so in this case. Isaac did not like Jacob. At any rate, he did not take to him. Jacob was the mother's pet. And perhaps the reason is not far to find. There is something in counterparts. That something we want. We like that of which we are ourselves somewhat deficient. Jacob, whatever else he was, was not very valiant; was not an enterprising man; was not a person of great physical manhood and prowess; and Esau was. On the other hand, another principle came in. We like likes; and Jacob had in him the old blood. Rebecca, sweet as she was when she let the pitcher down from her shoulder in her maiden simplicity and innocence, and the round rosy color of love and beauty, was a manager. She had craft; and so had Jacob. They were well matched, mother and son; and they were naturally fitted to each other. So the mother came to love, not the one that we should have thought she would have loved—the robust, enterprising, valiant, manly fellow—but the one that stayed at home. Not the one that dwelt quietly with his parents, and promoted the interests of the household, but the one that wasted time and squandered goods, running about as a hunter, the father liked.

It is said that because he made venison savory for his father, therefore his father liked him. Yes, he liked him for that, no doubt; but he liked him on account of the whole spirit which led him to be a hunter.

This narrative, from which I have selected the text, is one of an entirely ancient character; and we must step out of modern ideas in order to get really at its true standpoint.

You have no brother that you can sell. There is nothing which pertains to rank in brotherhood among us. Here, the first born is no better than the last born. But in the ancient time, and in the

families of the old patriarchs, as to-day in the Bedouin families, which resemble them very closely, the eldest born was chief, and to him came the government of the tribes, as well as almost all of the possessions; and in many instances he was not only the temporal chief, but the spiritual head. *Birthright*, therefore, meant inheritance of government, with all its honor, its dignity, and its responsibilities.

Now, when you come to look at these two brothers, and at this transaction, the Scriptures seem to put the fault on Esau. I do not believe, however, that there is a man in my hearing who has not felt, when listening to the recital of this event, that Jacob was a sneak, and that Esau was abused. I cannot conceive of any conduct more unmanly than Jacob's was. His brother came in from the fields where he had been hunting, overspent with traveling, and faint with hunger; and it is very evident that Jacob, though he did not speak the words, said in his mind: "I will take advantage of his condition." And how he carried out his purpose the account shows. What Esau said was this: "Feed me, I pray thee, for I am faint; I am at the point of dying." I will not say what a brother's feelings would naturally be at such a time; but I will say that a stranger who would not be moved to pity when a man was ready to perish for food, and would not give it to him if he had it to give, would be a brute. What did Jacob do—sly Jacob; politic Jacob; diplomatic Jacob? He had his eye all the time on ambition. He said to himself, "I have got him; now I will make a bargain with him. He cannot refuse me anything." And he said to Esau: "I will give you my pottage if you will give me your birthright. Exchange positions with me; let me be chief, and you take the place of the second born, and I will feed you." Was there ever anything meaner, more inhuman, more unbrotherly, more wicked, than that?

As to Esau, it is said, "Thus he despised his birthright." This is the only comment that is made. And in the New Testament it is alluded to by way of warning, where Esau is spoken of as one who, for a morsel of meat, sold his birthright, who afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing was rejected, and who found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Well, was it his fault? Yes, there was a great deal of fault on his part. You are to recollect that this circumstance indicates a very low moral tone in him—a want of appreciation of all that was involved in chieftainship. There are many things that a man would rather die from hunger for than give up. There is many a man that would sooner die than yield up love. There are some

men living, I hope, who would rather die than be untrue. There are many exalted and precious instances of manhood scattered all along the periods of history, and there are ten thousand more in obscure life, which God sees and men do not, where persons, for the sake of manhood, for the sake of lofty principles, for the sake of noble sentiments, for the sake of deep convictions, have given up everything and suffered everything. But Esau had so slight a conception of all that belonged to the dignities and responsibilities and labors of the first born of a household or tribe, that he gave them up rather than hunger. He ought to have died on the spot rather than sold his birthright. His conduct was vulgar and contemptible—and all the more because he could not sell it. He agreed to sell what he could not transfer. It was a Wall-Street transaction, and a "corner" at that; for it was not for him, but for the patriarch Isaac to convey the blessing, and give authenticity to the transaction. So there had to be another scene.

Jacob knew very well that this bargain which he had forced on his brother in a moment of extreme suffering would not execute itself. He knew that Esau, notwithstanding his promise, would be chief if nothing more was done. Therefore steps were taken to consummate the work which had been commenced. And at this point the mother figures largely—that beautiful, sweet, simple, genial, pastoral Rebekah, that darling girl who so excited the steward's admiration, and who so cheered Isaac that he said, after his mother's death, that he was comforted. You cannot tell, when you look at a seed, what the blossom is going to be; nor can you tell, when you look at the blossom, what the fruit is going to be. This crafty, shrewd, managing Rebekah took the affair in hand, and she sought to consummate by all manner of deceit that which was begun in inhumanity. She dressed Jacob, according to the old Testament account, in kid skins, on a given occasion, when she learned that Isaac was about to confer the distinct marks by which the chieftainship should pass from him to his son Esau. She also put on him Esau's dress. Likewise she had a kid brought from the flock, and made the pottage which old blind Isaac loved. And while Esau was out hunting for venison, she sent Jacob in to the aged patriarch. He feigned Esau's voice, and put out his hands for the old man to feel, whose suspicions were aroused, notwithstanding all the precautions which were taken to cover up the deception—for when a man has lost the sense of seeing, the sense of hearing and the other senses are very keen. Isaac questioned Jacob, and said, "Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not." Jacob went near to his father, and

he felt of him, and said, "The voice is Jacob's, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Suspicion still lingered in Isaac's mind; and he said, "Art thou my son Esau?" And Jacob said, "I am." And having smelt of his raiment, and felt of his hands, and questioned him, he concluded that it was Esau indeed, and pronounced the blessing upon him.

No sooner had Jacob left the room—for doubtless he made haste to leave it—than back came Esau with the pottage of nice venison which he had made for his father, and asked for the blessing. Then the deception is discovered; Isaac tells Esau that he has given the blessing to another; and bitterly does Esau cry, "Bless me, even me also, oh, my father! Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" Yes, there was a blessing for him; but the first was gone. The chieftainship had been bestowed on his brother. That which had been sold, but which could not be delivered by the seller, had now been stolen by fraud and by craft.

And yet, leaving out of sight the way in which this result was procured, it was just the right thing. What sort of a leader would Esau have made—this impetuous man; this man of temper; this man who used his force hastily; this man who followed his impulses? If you were going to found a nation, if you were going to administer the affairs of a community, after all, the patient, forelooking, calculating Jacob would be the better magistrate. He would bring things together better. He would know how to be politic among discordant men. He would know how to knit the edges of that which would otherwise ravel out. He was a better administrator and a better diplomatist than Esau. He ought to have been born first; it was a mistake that he was not! But the thing having taken place, and all having been said about it that ought to be said, everybody takes a long breath, and feels that it was lucky for the nation that it was Jacob, and not Esau, that received the blessing.

Well, those two brothers may be set forth in the history of men, as representing two great elements—mind and matter. Here was Esau, who represented brute force, which is always at the moment strongest, but at the end weakest. And here was Jacob, timid, cautious, politic, and thoughtful. At the first, such a man always seems to be inferior; but in the end he always comes out ahead. So it was with these two patriarchs. To the end of his life Esau was a man of valor; and if Jacob had resorted to force Esau would have swept away all his possessions; but Jacob managed him. When he returned from his uncle Laban's with flocks and herds, Esau came with bands to meet him; but Jacob was too much for

Esau. If they had gone to battle Esau would have smote Jacob hip and thigh; but diplomatic Jacob fixed it all right. He talked so smoothly that he conciliated Esau, they made up their quarrels, and one went down to Edom, and the other went back to Palestine.

Now, in the history of the world does not strength of muscle perform an inferior part? Is it not thought, is it not foresight, is it not connected thought, is it not persistent thought, is it not brain, that in the end governs? Muscle is very good, but it takes the second place. It may be first-born, but its birthright is gone just as soon as the brain has a chance to manage and contrive. It is thinking power that governs. And if men are low in society, it is because their brain-force is low. If men are high in society, as a general rule it is because intelligence goes toward the top. If, therefore, men would be superiors and leaders, thought-power must be developed in them. If men are content with physical power, with brute force, with mere outward acquirements, they must take the second place. They may be first-born, but they will come out second.

But that is not what I was going to preach upon to-night. I want to call your attention to the fact that the mistake of Esau in selling his birthright, which was in the national history so disgraceful, was the result, not of a career, but of an hour of weakness. If he had been taken an hour before, he never would have made such a bargain. If he had been taken the day after, he could not have been persuaded to make it. He was caught at just that point of time when everything in him was weakened. His body was exhausted; his mind flagged; his courage had faded away; and at that unfortunate moment temptation was brought upon, and he fell.

Now, I want to say a word to you on the subject of your *weak hours*. It is said that no chain is stronger than its weakest link. It is true. And when the strain is brought to bear upon a man, he is no stronger than he is in his weakest hour. Taking men without shelter, without that defence which they get from institutions, and without that succor which they derive from each other; looking at them simply in their own separate individual standing, they are as strong as they are in their weakest hours, and no stronger. Events show, continually, that all the efforts, all the industries, all the progress, all the good things of a whole life, may be destroyed by one weak hour, so that men may seek for repentance, carefully, with tears and anguish, and find no place for it.

What, then, do we understand by *weak hours?* They are various, and they come from various causes. There are many of

whom it may be said that their weak hour is their strongest. That is, many persons are placable, are kind, are fruitful in friendship, are wise, when they can keep down their temper; but they are simply insane when their temper is up; and they may do in a single hour that which shall wreck the rest of their life. One rash, hot hour, may overthrow forty years of caution and prudence. It is temper set on fire of hell that is their destruction.

Other men have their hours of weakness in avarice. That is, there are hours in men's lives when their lust and greed of gold is exacerbated. We call them *weak* hours, although the temptation of their greed is *strong*. Those are hours of weakness in which the power to resist evil is weak. A man is weak, not by the power that assails, but by the want of defensive power.

It made no difference where the assault was made at Gettysburg on the third day, by the adversary that attempted to pierce the center of the lines; and it made no difference that they came after a perfect whirlwind of cannonading; for the resisting power was greater than the attacking power. That is an hour of weakness when the resisting power is weak.

Now, nothing is weaker than the conscience when it is paralyzed by the touch of avarice. There is such an appetite in some natures for gold, that although at times they are manly and good in a thousand respects, at other times, when avarice dominates, their moral sentiments are paralyzed by it; and those are their weak hours.

There are some men whose weak hour is connected with their passions. There are some men whose weak hour is in the lower grade of pleasures. There are some men whose weak hour is in eating. There are other men whose weak hour is in drinking. Oh, how many noble men have been girdled, how many men of genius have been utterly destroyed, how many persons of hope and promise have been completely overthrown, by intemperance! Such is the nature of things, that those who are cold and selfish are seldom the victims of drink. Thirsty and bibulous men are almost always warm-blooded, sensitive, companionable. Free-hearted men, who like to throw their arms round about their companions' shoulders, and lean upon them, are the men who are most easily tempted, and who are most liable to run into excesses. There are many men who are excellent, and are built up right all around except on one side. Their weak hour lies in the direction of drink.

There are many men whose weak hour lies in their appetites. They are strong in conscience, and strong in reason; but their appetites mislead them.

Now, every man knows his own weakness, or may know it. Whatever passion, or appetite, or dominating motive in one's life has such ascendancy as to blind the reason and quiet the conscience, produces his hour of weakness. Sometimes grief, sometimes weariness from overwork, sometimes discouragement, sometimes loneliness and desolateness, sometimes pride, sometimes vanity, according to the nature of the person, leads to his weak hour. There are hours in which one seems to be in the supreme possession of a single malign influence, whatever it may be. And if temptation is brought to bear upon him then, he is led to reason as Esau reasoned, and is carried away as by a flood.

The dangers that are connected with these hours of weakness are manifold; but where persons are surrounded by the family they are saved, for the most part. There is, however, scarcely a boy brought up from the cradle to an honorable manhood, and confirmed in virtue and integrity, who does not do things in the family which, if known, would bring stigma upon him for life. But such is the nature of parental love, that it swallows, as in quicksand, all trace and remembrance of these things. Oh, how many lies a mother forgets! Oh, how many meannesses pass from a mother's memory! Oh, how many disgraceful little freaks does a mother sink in the oblivion of forgetfulness! Oh, how many things which send the child home in disgrace from the school, from the playground, or from the earlier contacts of life, are forgotten there, which, if they were made the tests of his character, as judged by his fellow-men, would be his ruin! The child's faults are hidden at home; and it is the arm and heart of the father and mother that hold him and redeem him. They suffer for him vicariously, they reassure him, they comfort him, they put him on his feet, and they start him out again. There is many a man that would be branded as a thief if all that is known about him inside of the family were known outside of it; and yet he comes out honest. There is many and many a man who would be denounced as a liar, as a perjured villain, if other people knew all that his father and mother know about him; and yet he stands up in the midst of life as a man of truth. Many a man that is honored would be dishonored, if it were not for the household. The family is as a spring on a hillside, by whose moisture the grass and the flowers are nourished and made beauteous. But, after all, do you understand how much it is a fort? Do you know how many times it saves a man from enemies that run after him, and shelters him until he is strong enough to meet them?

We see, then, why it is that those who have no household have

such hard work in life. We see why those youth who are sympathetic and easily molded are swept away by little violations. We never hesitate to condemn them when they go wrong. We do not stop to think that we may be worse in the sight of God than these urchins who have neither father, nor mother, nor shelter. It does not occur to us that, if like them, we had had to make our own way, we very likely should have had more faults than they have. We do not make allowance for our advantages over them in having the protection of the family.

Consider, then, the dangers and perils to which men in society are exposed who have no shelter; who have no place where they may hide from temptation.

In New York there has been a man convicted of murder, who, in an hour of intoxication, struck down a fellow passenger and slew him. That one deed, committed in his hour of weakness, has altered his whole life, and changed his whole eternity. It was an act of but an hour—no, of but ten minutes—no, of but one minute; and yet it has shaped his destiny.

A man oppressed, goaded by his affairs, says: "I have no business to forge a note; but, after all, it will not be known; I will take it up, and it will do no harm." So he signs the note, and turns it over, and writes a name not his own on the back. There are two, there are three such notes; and he tides himself over his difficulty with them. He deposits them, and they are discounted. One comes due, and he pays it, and nothing is known about it. The second comes due, and he pays that, and nothing is known about it. Just as the third is coming due he is taken sick with the bilious fever. When it comes due he is on his back, and out of his head, and it is sent to the endorser, and he swears that it is forged, and the man is caught. He did not mean any harm by it, but harm comes from it. I presume that there are some men in this house who have such notes out: may God keep you from a fever! In an hour of weakness a man may do that which, being detected, will ruin his whole life. Afterwards he may say: "Fool! Fool!" Yes, *fool!* But it is too late.

In hours of weakness, what words that pierce like a poisoned dagger may you not speak! And though, afterwards, you try to wash out the blood with tears, it will not be washed out. What separations in the household have taken place from the inflammation of a single hour! What crimes have been committed during undefended hours! Into what dilemmas, into what profound dangers, have men flung themselves, by the heedlessness of a weak hour! What avails it that you are strong in your hours of

strength? When health is co-incident with good fortune, when home is happy, when business is prosperous, when the air is full of oxygen, and everything promises well—then men go forth; and how strong they are! How they parry the thrust of temptations, and pierce them, and achieve victories over them! But by-and-by the strength runs out; the weather changes; affairs are at cross-purposes; they are wearied and turmoiled; things go hard with them; they are half crazed, and scarcely know what they are doing; and some temptation turns upon them on this corner or on that, and seizes them, and has dominion over them. In their strong hour they were strong enough: it is in their weak hour that they are weak.

Here is a precipice full five hundred feet high. All around are steep rocks. Nobody is going to climb up these. The defense is complete with the exception that there is one little narrow path that winds up from behind, and is undefended. The fort is strong enough at every point but that. The engineer neglected that point; and, taking advantage of it, the enemy will assail and destroy the fort. He goes around, avoiding every place but the weak one, and there he converges all the force of his attack.

When the enemy of men's souls desire to conquer them, he does not take them when they are on advancing waves of progress, or upward flights of faith; he does not take them when they are calm, composed, and strong; he does not take them when they stand in serried ranks, holding one another up; he does not take them when they are prospered; he waits and watches that he may catch them in their weak hours, and then overcome them. Therefore it is that we are taught to be vigilant, to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. For no man knows, when he has once entered into temptation, how he is going to get out of it.

What, then, shall we do in this matter? There are, as you know, storm signals in all our ports, inland and maritime; and no prudent captain puts out to sea when the storm signal is up.

There are signs and signals of warning in men's lives which they may know; and no man who cares for himself will put out when he sees that he is going into a storm squall—into a hour of weakness and peril. Remain in port, keep snug, do not leave the anchor-ground or the pier at such times. Hold yourself where you can get help. Avoid that which experience has shown you to be dangerous. If you have learned what it is, and where it is, do not go into it.

When the barometer begins to fall, you shall see, off the coast between Halifax and New York, staunch steamers, schooners,

brigantines, all sorts of craft, making one way—homeward; and one who has been captain says, "They have smelled the storm, and they are wise in seeking to escape it; for we are going to have a rouser."

When men are out on the sea of life, there are signs and tokens of storm which the barometer of their own experience reveals to them. And let them spread all their sail, and make for port as quick as possible. Let them not run risks. Let them hide until the storm be overpast. It may not seem a very courageous thing in a man to hide; but it is a safe thing. When you cannot meet the adversary, elude him. Resist him, and make him flee, if you can; but if you cannot make him flee, rather than that he should take you captive, run yourself.

What are some of the safeguards, then, against those perils? Of all places to be marked for avoidance are those on which you have fought a battle and failed once, twice, and thrice; but chiefly when men are in danger in their weak hours—then is the time for them to avail themselves of institutions. Says one man, "I have easily besetting sins. I am striving against them, and when I have overcome them I mean to join the Church." Now, the Church is a fort into which a man should run, that he may fight better for his life against the adversary.

A man says, I am full of diseases from head to foot; and as soon as I get cured of them I am going into the hospital." What are you going into the hospital for, when you are cured?

The Church is a hospital where men may be cured. The Church is a bulwark that hides men from the stroke of battle. The Church is a school-house. It is a father's or a brother's house. It is a family, all the members of which are striving to help, as far as they can, those who are associated with them. The Church is a mutual insurance company, in one sense. That is, those who belong to it are striving to help each other to be better, the Scripture being their charter, and Christ being their exemplar. It is an institution in which men are trying to save their fellow-men by throwing about them the silken cords of sympathy, and giving them the right hand of fellowship, and teaching them to help themselves.

Many a man that has been lost would have been saved if he had gone into the Church, and said, "I am weak, and in peril, and there are hours when I do not feel myself able to stand: brethren, hold me up." If a man comes into the Church saying, "I have met with a great change; thank God, I am safe; and I come in here to shine"—if that is the spirit with which one comes into the Church,

and if he can come in so really and truly, we want men for lanterns and headlights all along the road, and it is not a bad thing. But then there are multitudes of men who might well come into the Church, saying, "Brethren, give me a harbor. There are storms after me, and I cannot stand the sea. Give me anchorage." Let such men in. Give them shelter and protection. What is a Church good for, that is not good for helping sinners? Men say, "Take care of the Church." A Church is not good for anything except for what it can do for men. Is a hospital built to look pretty and to be kept clean and pure? What is a hospital good for, but to receive persons who have diseases, and to cure them? A Church is good in the proportion in which it helps men who cannot get help elsewhere; and the more desperate is the case of the man whom it rescues, the more noble is the Church. Well, what about its own reputation? Let that go. *He that would save his own life shall lose it.*

In these weak hours one should, as far as possible, avail himself of the privileges of the household, or the privileges of fellowship. There are a great many temptations that are like bubbles. They swell up before you, and have in them all the colors of the rainbow; they are exquisite; and if you put your finger on them they are gone. There are a great many temptations that, if a man could touch them with the finger of friendship, would burst, and disappear forever. And in this matter, let your mother, or your wife, if you have one, be your counsellor. If you have not mother or wife, then take into your confidence any woman that will befriend you, who is a true woman, and who will give you wise counsel. Or, if you are so situated that this may not be, take some good man for your confidential friend. And let me tell you that the temptations which are the most venomous and dangerous are oftentimes entirely destroyed by going and saying to your mother, your father, or some one else in whom you confide, "I am tempted to do so and so; and I am tempted beyond what I can bear." It is wonderful what a safety there is, sometimes, in speaking out concerning the thing which is acting as an inflammation in your bosom—for many temptations are like fermentations; they keep working, working, working; and silence seems to make them work. As yeast works best in darkness, and as seeds sprout best underground, where the heat reaches them, and the light does not, so many temptations play in the imagination, and work in secrecy. And men, not understanding this, think they are persuaded by the devil. But at times you will dissipate the temptation, you will disfranchise the danger, if you

will make it a matter of confidence. Go to some one. You are too proud? That is your only safety! You are so proud that if you should go and tell another your trouble, after that your pride would keep you from running into danger. It breaks the charm, sometimes, to speak of a thing to yourself even, and still more to speak of it to another. Go to others and tell them how you are imperiled, and say, "Watch for me! Help me! Save me!"

I never knew a person who, when the undertow had swept him out, would not lift up his voice, and cry, "Help!" Men are caught by the undertow of temptation, and are being carried down to destruction, and they see one and another and another who might succor them, but they are too proud or too self-confident to ask for help, and before they realize the extent of their danger they are swept beyond the reach of aid. How many persons might be redeemed if they would avail themselves of the assistance of others!

I recollect the case of a clerk, an acute business man, an intelligent book-keeper, favorably situated, who was invited into society, and into society above his level. His ambition was gratified, but the expenses were greater than he could bear, and he was ashamed to say to his companions, "I cannot afford to train with you," and so he fell under temptation. But what could have been wiser than for him to have gone to any honorable persons in the circle where he moved, and said, "I am living on a salary as a book-keeper, you invite me to you houses, I am obliged in some way to reciprocate; and, to tell you the truth, my friends, I am tempted to steal from my employers," thus making a clean breast of it?

There are many things that a confessional is good for in the Roman Church; but there is no better confessional than the ear of an honest man. Therefore let every young person who is beset by temptations go to some one and say, in simplicity and honesty, "I am tempted—help me." Do not you suppose he would be succored and delivered from that peril in time to come? Whatever your temptation is, whenever you are in danger, no matter what snare has caught you, and is dragging you steadily along, nearer, nearer, and nearer to destruction, make bold outcry, and there will be some one who will hear your wail of distress. If there is the solicitation of evil following you, and beckoning you, and gaining power over you, run to somebody; seek some counsellor; resort to some friend. No matter how much your cheek may mantle with blushes, it is better than that you should put it off till by-and-by, when it will do no good.

Take care of these weak hours. It was when he returned from a violent chase, begrimed with dust, and threw himself down, and

seemed, in his faintess, about to die, that Esau sold his birthright. How many, since, have sold their birthright—their honor, their purity, their honesty, their integrity! Beware of these hours of weakness.

Finally, let us spiritualize this matter in regard to the whole of life, as well as in regard to special parts of it. We are all of us the sons of a King. In some sense every man may say, "I am first-born; I am a child of God, elect of heaven, born to dignities, to scepters, and to the righteousness and blessedness of an infinite estate; but I am tempted, in the turmoil of life, to sell my birthright for fame, for pleasure, for pelf, for ambition, for appetite, for lust." Many and many a savory mess of red pottage there is presented to men. Satan turns to account every single want of your nature, and says, "Sell me your birthright—I will give you pleasure; sell me your birthright—I will give you strength and honor. Why should you throw away the charm of your youth? Why should you not take the joy of the dance? Why should you not live a life large and free? Why should you not enjoy the society of gay companions? Come, give me your birthright, and I will will give you all that your heart can desire." So, many and many a man sells his soul for a mess of pottage. And when life has gone down to its dregs, how bitter they are to his taste! How many look back in their old age, with inexpressible bitterness, and say, "It is too late!" And how many, if they could stand here in their last days, and look upon the faces of the young, would say to them, "Oh, in the name of God, take warning from my example! If I had a chance to live my life over, how differently I would live! I have thrown it away. It is too late for me; but it is not too late for you!"

Oh, dying men—all of you who have your life yet in your hands, and who can yet go to the right or to the left; all unchained souls who can yet feel the inspiration of truth and honor and righteousness—beware of these weak hours: beware of them in things temporal and in things spiritual. Do not sell your souls for that which will at last seem a most contemptible price, and die forever.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Draw near to us, our Father, that our thoughts may help themselves, and find their way unto thee. May we measure our spirits upon thine. Borne up by thine inspiration, may we have some realization of thy wisdom, of thy goodness, of thy greatness, of thy power, to us-ward. May we have some blessed consolation in thy promises, in the hopes that are set before us, and in that new and living way which Christ has opened.

We thank thee for the revelation of the truth in Jesus our Lord. We thank thee that he hath brought so much out of heaven down to earth; that he hath represented in himself the possibilities which are in us, that we may see in his example the perfect manhood for which we should strive. May we rejoice that we are able to discern the Father in the Son. May we be able by thy Spirit to enlarge more and more our conception above the letter, and beyond it, and to interpret something of the height and depth and length and breadth of that love which passeth understanding. May we rejoice in Christ, not fearing his power, but beholding love upon his brow, measuring it by this, the crowning truth of all that we know, that he was willing to lay down his life for those who, being sinful, were his enemies. May we rejoice in that love, in its plenary power, in its patience, in its cleansing and healing qualities; and may we be glad that we are not dependent upon our wisdom alone; that there is inspiration and guidance for us; that there is, invisible, but working all around about us, by the grace of God, help in every time of need.

Be pleased, we pray thee, to shed light upon our dark hours. Be pleased to give strength to us in our weak hours. Be pleased to revive the life that fades from our memory. Grant that thy truth may be ever present with us. And when we can find nothing else, and our souls are like the prophet in the wilderness who cast himself down, and prayed that he might die, let thy messenger come to us as he came to him. Send to every one thine angel to cheer and comfort.

And we beseech of thee that our faith in thee may never fail. Though men fail us, and though we fail ourselves, may we still cling to thee. Though surrounded by multiplied temptations, we fail, may we rise again. Though we be cast down, may we not be destroyed. Though we be perplexed and grieved, and go astray from thee, hurting ourselves, yet may we be held by the mighty hand of God unto salvation. And grant that we may behold, afar off, the bright, shining city, and hear the voices that call to us—remembering whom they loved upon earth—Come, come. And hearing, may we say, one to another, Come. And may the Spirit perpetually say to us, in the silence of the night, or in the noise of the day, Come. And so may we feel ourselves drawn evermore toward him that loved us and gave himself for us. And may we not walk with our heads cast down. May we not walk as men in prison. We are free in Christ Jesus. We have become thy friends, and are no more thy slaves. And grant that we may be able to walk with thy conscious dignity and with thy triumph perpetually upon us, and to rejoice at the dispensations of God in his providence, day by day, knowing that love cannot hurt us, and will not overburden us, nor suffer us to be swept away by temptations which we cannot bear, and that every trial will open the door of escape.

Will the Lord be pleased to manifest himself thus to every soul, especially to thy servants who have long served thee, and who are drawing near to the end of life. Grant thy blessing to those who are in the midst of life, bearing the burden and heat of the day. Be with those who are despondent. Strengthen those who are weak. Grant that they may stand for their com-

mon Master, under all circumstances where thy providence shall place them, valiantly, bravely, lovingly.

Wilt thou be pleased to grant thy blessing to rest upon the young. From the beginning, consecrate their being to thee. May they commence aright, and continue to grow stronger and stronger to the end.

We pray that thou wilt be merciful to any who are out of the way; to any who are tempted; to any who need succor. Be near to all who are beset with evil. Lord, look down upon them with compassion. Are there not many in thy sight for whom prayers have been offered, but who have gone astray? Are there not children who have wandered from the admonition received from mothers in their youth, who have defiled themselves, and are bound up in the pleasures or wickednesses of this world? We pray that thou wilt bring them to a remembrance of the past which shall take them over the flood which is sweeping them on towards destruction, to the days of their childhood, to their mother's consecration, and to the purity and simplicity of their home. And may there be some who shall begin again, and count the time sufficient in which they have wrought the will of the flesh. Are there not some in thy presence to-night who shall begin this hour to serve their God, turning away from sin, and strengthening themselves in all righteousness?

We beseech of thee that thy Spirit will take care of any yearning hearts that there may be. May the spark not be quenched, may the flame not be extinguished, may the bruised reed not be broken, until thou shalt have brought forth judgment unto victory.

We pray that thy servants may be more and more devoted in prayer; more and more earnest for the salvation of men; more and more vigilant in looking after those who are round about them; more and more desirous of helping one another, bearing one another's burdens, and succoring those who need help.

We pray that that Spirit which was in the Lord Jesus Christ, of love and patience and fidelity, may be in all his people. May we grow therein, and abound therein.

And now we commit ourselves to thy care. Who is there that can take care of us but thyself—thou of the wounded hand, thou of the pierced side, thou that hast worn the thorn? What are we that we should not be pierced? Thou didst suffer for our sins; why should we not suffer for our own? Thou didst suffer for others; why should not we suffer for ourselves? Thou that hast had compassion, and hath compassion, to whom can we come but unto thee? We shelter ourselves under thy wings. We look up to thee, and lay our burden upon thee, and trust in thee. Living or dying, we are the Lord's. Be pleased, thou unwearied One, to accept the offering which we bring of ourselves to thee; and keep us near to thee. And when, at last, we shall pass from the shadow to the substance, from the twilight to the full day, from the vision to the realization of God, be pleased to administer unto us that immortality in glory which thou hast promised unto thy servants.

And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, shall be the praise evermore. *Amen.*

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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